M. K. GANDHI

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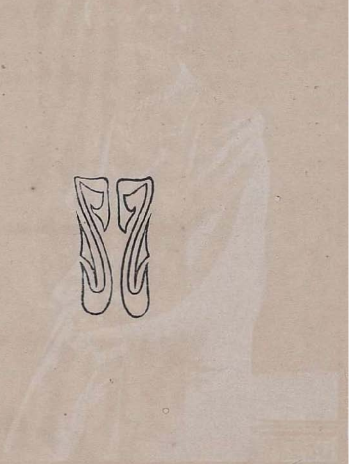
A STUDY



GANESH & CO. MADRAS.

The sole object in publishing this short study of Mr. Gandhi, the hero of the Passive Resistence Movement, and leader of the Indians in South Africa, is, to devote the proceeds in relief of our brothren in South Africa in their present struggle.

GANESH & Co.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

THE story of the great woes, our countrymen have endured in South Africa, since Indian immigration began, ought to be too well known to every son of India to need recapitulation. It is a story full of harrowing revelations, on the one hand, of the heart-rending sufferings the British Indian has had to undergo, and on the other, the depths to which white humanity can descend. It is a story of inhuman treatment and helpless suffering, of racial antipathy and commercial jealousy, of disabilities, wrongs and humiliations, of a flagrant defiance of the elementary laws of civilised life for which there is hardly a parallel in modern times. The tragedy of that story is all but unrelieved, unrelieved indeed but for two things. The one is the illumining presence in it of a personality like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and the other is the dauntless stand, our countrymen, high and low, Hindu, Mahomedan, Christian and Parsee, have made for their rights. The atrocities inflicted upon our countrymen may almost tempt us to think, that man was made not in the image of God but in that of His Ancient Enemy. When however we read the account of the splendid sacrifice and heroism displayed by our countrymen in the battle for honour and self-respect, a sense of

human nature redeemed steals over us. The history of the world, said Thomas Carlyle in memorable words, is the history of its great men. One may in like manner say, without violence to the truth, that the history of the vast transformations, we have witnessed in South Africa during the last three years and more in the attitude of the Indian Community, is the history of one man, Mr. Gandhi. For a fifteen years he has been the accredited friend, philosopher, and guide, of the Indian Community in South Africa. He has been the moulder, director and inspiring genius of the Passive Resistance Movement in the Transvaal. Under his generalship the British Indians in South Africa, from being a mass of discordant and repelling units, have been welded into a close-knit body, pulsating with a sense of common life and common responsibility. During the last five years Mr. Gandhi's name has been much before the public. Mr. J. J. Doke, a baptist minister of Johannesburg, with a generosity not always characteristic of the ministers of the Gospel, has made him the hero of a biography. And certainly few men in India to-day enjoy a larger meed of the affection and devotion of the rising generation. Truly a remarkable man ! A nature strung to what is finest and best in life, a lofty ideal of duty strenuously pursued, an ever-present and haunting sense of claims larger than those of the personal self, such are some of the elements that have gone to make him, as the following sketch of his career will show.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on the 2nd of October 1869, the youngest of three children, in a vaishya family, at Porbandar, a city of Kathiawar in Guzerat. Mr. Gandhi's immediate ancestors seem to have been quite remarkable. Mr. Gandhi's grandfather was Dewan of the Rana of Porbandar and an anecdote illustrates how fearless he was. Incurring the displeasure of the Queen who was acting as Regent for her son, he had to flee the court of Porbandar and take refuge with the Nawab of Junagadh, who received him with great kindness. But there was a rift in the lute. The courtiers remarked that the ex-prime minister of Porbandar gave his salute to the Nawab with his left hand. But the intrepid man replied, " In spite of all that I have suffered I keep my right hand for Porbandar still." Mr. Gandhi's father was no less remarkable. Succeeding his father as Dewan of Porbandar and losing like his father the favour of the Ruling Chief he repaired to Rajkot where he was entertained as Dewan. He was a severely religious man and could repeat the Baghavad Gita from beginning to end. The Thakore Sahib of Rajkot pressed him to accept a large grant of land, but he refused, and even when the entreaties and admonitions of friends and relatives prevailed at last, he accepted only a fraction of what was offered. Happening to hear one day the Assistant Political Agent hold abusive language regarding the Thakore Sahib, he indignantly repudiated it. His Ominipotence the Political Agent, demanded an

apology which was refused. He thereupon ordered the offending Dewan to be arrested and detained under a tree for some hours. The apology was eventually waived and a reconciliation effected. Such was the father. Mr. Gandhi's mother, however, was the most remarkable of all. Her influence on the character of her son has been deep and profound. Religion was to her the breath of life. Long and rigorous were her fasts ; many and abounding were her charities ; and never could she brook to see a starving soul in her neighbourhood. In these respects she was indeed a typical Hindu woman. Such were the parents of whom the subject of our present sketch was born.

Mr. Gandhi was duly put to school at Porbandar, but a change occurring in its fortunes, the whole family removed to Rajkot. At Rajkot the boy attended first a Vernacular School, and afterwards the Kathiawar High School, whence he passed the Matriculation Examination at the age of seventeen. Mr. Gandhi was married at the age of twelve while still at school.

An incident in his school life deserves more than ordinary attention. Born and bred in an atmosphere of uncompromising Vaishnavaism, he had learned to perfection its ritual and worship, if not, also to some extent, its rationale and doctrine. Vaishnavaism emphasises and exalts the virtue of non-killing (Ahimsa), and Vaishnavas are strict vegetarians. The teaching at school, however,

demolished the young Gandhi's unlearned faith, and he became a sceptic. This wreck of faith brought one disastrous consequence in its train. The young Gandhi and some school companions of his sincerely came to believe that vegetarianism was a folly and superstition, and that, to be civilised, the eating of flesh was essential. Nor were the boys slow to put their belief into action. Buying some flesh in secret every evening they went to a secluded spot on the bank of a stream and had a convivial meal. But the young Gandhi's conscience was all the while never at peace. At home he had to tell lies to excuse his lack of appetite, and one subterfuge led to another. The boy loved truth and hated falsehood, and to avoid telling lies he abjured flesh-eating forever. Truly, the child is father of the man !

After he passed the Matriculation examination Mr. Gandhi was advised by a friend of the family to go to England to qualify himself for the Bar. Mr. Gandhi's mother, however, would not listen to any such thing. Many a gruesome tale had the good woman heard of the abandoned nature of English life, and she shrank from the prospect of exposing her young son to all its temptations, as from the thought of hell. But the son was firm and the mother had to yield. But not until she had taken her son before a Jain sannyasin and made him swear three solemn vows for swearing wine, flesh and women did she give her consent.

Once in England, Mr. Gandhi set about to make

of himself a thorough English "gentleman." An Indian friend of his in England who gloried in his anglicised ways took him in hand and gave lessons in fashion. Under his inspiration he began to school himself in dancing, English music and French, in fact in all the accomplishments needed for the mighty role of the English "gentleman." His heart was, however, not in the matter. The three vows he had taken haunted him like a spectre. One day he went to a party and, there, was served with flesh soup. He had now to make his choice between his three vows and the character of the English "gentleman." He then and there rose up and left the party much to the chagrin and indignation of the friend before alluded to. He thereafter bade adieu to all his new-fangled ways; his feet ceased to dance, his fingers ceased to tune the violin, and the possibilities of the English "gentleman" in him were lost forever.

All this proved to be but the beginning of a keen spiritual struggle which stirred his being to its depths, and out of which he emerged into a triumphant self-conciousness. The eternal problems of existence faced him and pressed for an answer. Friends were not wanting who tried to persuade him that in Christianity he would find the light for which he yearned. At the same time he began to make a close study of the Baghavad Gita. Step by step, as he went on, he was overwhelmed with its transcendent sublimity; the spirit of the Gita pierced into his

very marrow. He felt himself transported into a new world over which peace unfathomable brooded in silence and serenity. All his searchings of spirit ceased. The little bark of his soul finding its haven was evermore at rest.

His life in England was otherwise uneventful. He passed the London Matriculation Examination, qualified himself for the Bar, and returned to India.

News of a most heartrending character awaited his arrival at Bombay. Unknown to himself a calamity, which to a Hindu at least is one of the great calamities of life, had befallen him. His mother who had loved him as perhaps only a Hindu mother could, who had saved him from moral ruin and who had, no doubt, winged ceaseless thoughts of love and prayer for her far away son in England, that angel of a mother was no more. She had been dead sometime and the news had been purposely kept a secret from him. We shall not attempt to describe his feelings when the news at last was disclosed to him.

The next eighteen months Mr. Gandhi spent partly at Bombay and partly at Rajkot devoting himself to a deeper study of law and the Hindu scriptures. He also attached himself to the Bombay High Court. But there was other work to do for him in a different part of the world, and the fates thus fulfilled themselves. A firm at Porbandar with a branch at Pretoria had an important law suit in South Africa in which many Indians were concerned. The

conduct of this law suit, expected to last for over a year, being offered to him, Mr. Gandhi accepted it and proceeded to South Africa.

From the very day he set foot at Natal he had to taste of that cup of humiliation which has been the Indian's portion all these years. At court he was rudely ordered to remove the Barristers' turban he had on, and he left the court at once burning with mortification. This experience however was soon eclipsed by a host of others still more ignominious. Journeying to the Transvaal in a Railway train the Guard unceremoniously ordered him to quit the first-class compartment, though he had paid for it, and betake himself to the van. Refusing, he was brutally dragged out with his luggage. And the train at once steamed off. All this was on British soil! In the Transvaal itself things were even worse. As he was sitting on the box of a coach on the way to Pretoria, the Guard asked him to dismount because he wanted to smoke there. A refusal brought two consecutive blows in quick succession. In Pretoria he was once kicked off a foot-path by a sentry. The catalogue may be still further extended, but it would be a weariness of the flesh.

The law suit which he had been engaged to conduct was at last over. A social gathering was given in his honour on the eve of his departure to India. That evening Mr. Gandhi chanced to see a local newspaper which announced that a bill was about to be introduced into the Colonial Parliament to dis-

franchise Indians, and that other bills of a similar character were soon to follow. Mr. Gandhi was alarmed. He realised how grave the situation was and explained to the assembled guests that if the Indian Community in South Africa was to be saved from utter extinction, immediate and resolute steps should be taken. At his instance a message was at once sent to the Colonial Parliament requesting delay of proceedings, which was soon followed up by a largely signed petition against the new measure. But all was of no avail. The bill was passed in due course. Now another largely signed petition was sent to the Colonial Secretary in England, and in consequence the Royal Assent was withheld. But this again was of no avail, for the same goal was reached by a new bill through a slightly different route. Now it was, that Mr. Gandhi seriously mooted the question of a central organization in South Africa to keep vigilant watch over the interests of the Indians. But it was represented to him that such an organization would be impossible unless he himself consented to remain in South Africa. The prominent Indians guaranteed him a practice if he should choose to stay. In response to their wishes Mr. Gandhi enrolled himself in the Supreme Court of Natal though not without some objection on the ground of his colour.

We may say that from this time on Mr. Gandhi began to see his life in its true perspective. He had to choose between prospect and preferment in

India, and humiliation and struggle in South Africa. How much depended on his choice! The South African Indian Community were like a flock of sheep without a shepherd, and he chose to be the shephered. South Africa was the vineyard of the Lord in which he was called to dig and delve, and he chose to be the labourer. From the day he made the choice he has consecrated himself to his work as to a high and lofty mission, with results everybody knows of.

Having enrolled himself as a Barrister of the Supreme Court of Natal Mr. Gandhi strenuously devoted himself to make his practice a success, even while educating and organising the Indian Community. In 1896 he came to India to take his wife and children to South Africa. Before he left South Africa he had written and published an "open letter" detailing the wrongs and grievances of Indians in South Africa.

News of the splendid work which he had done in South Africa had travelled before him to India, and Indians of all classes joined in according him an enthusiastic reception wherever he went. In these meetings Mr. Gandhi had of course to make some speeches. Our good friend, Reuter, sent highly-garbled versions of his addresses to South Africa. Mr. Gandhi was represented as telling his Indian audiences that Indians in South Africa were uniformly treated like wild beasts. The blood of the Colonials was up and the feeling against Mr. Gandhi

reached white heat. Meeting after meeting was held in which he was denounced in the most scathing terms. Meanwhile Mr. Gandhi was urgently requested to return to Natal without a moment's delay, and he embarked accordingly.

The steamer carrying Mr. Gandhi reached Durban on the same day as another steamer, which had left Bombay with 600 Indian passengers on board two days after Mr. Gandhi's departure. The two ships were immediately quarantined indefinitely. Great things were transpiring at Durban meanwhile. The Colonials were determined not to land the Asiatics. Gigantic demonstrations were taking place, and the expediency of sending the Indians back was gravely discussed. It was plain that the Colonials would go any length to accomplish their purpose. The more boisterous spirits even proposed the sinking of the ship. Word was sent to Mr. Gandhi that if he and his compatriots should attempt to land they would do so at infinite peril; but threats were of no avail. On the day on which the new Indian arrivals were expected to land a huge concourse had assembled at the docks. There was no end of hissing, shouting, roaring and cursing. The Attorney-General of Natal addressed the crowd and promised them that the matter would receive the early attention of Parliament, commanding them at the same time in the name of the Queen to disperse. And the crowd dispersed. Mr. Gandhi came ashore some time after the landing of his fellow

passengers, having previously sent his wife and children to the house of a friend. He was immediately recognised by some of the stragglers who at once began to hiss and shout. A rickshaw was engaged, but the way was blocked. Mr. Gandhi walked on foot with a European friend and when they reached one of the streets the crowd was so big that the two friends were separated. The crowd at once began to maul Mr. Gandhi till the Police came and took him to the house of a friend. The Police Superintendent expressed his apprehensions that the mob in their frenzy would even set fire to the house. Mr. Gandhi was obliged to dress himself as a Police Constable and take refuge in the Police Station. This ebullition of abnormal feeling subsided after some time and a momentous page in Mr. Gandhi's life was turned.

In October 1899 war broke out between the English and the Boers in South Africa. Mr. Gandhi with the sagacity of a true leader at once perceived what a golden opportunity it was to the British Indians to vindicate their self-respect and readiness to suffer in the cause of the Empire. At his call hundreds of our countrymen in South Africa were glad to enlist themselves as Volunteers, but the offer was rejected with scorn by the powers that be. The offer was renewed a second time, only to meet with a similar fate. When however the British arms sustained some disasters, it was recognised that every man available should be put into the fields and

Mr. Gandhi's offer on behalf of his compatriots in South Africa was accepted. A thousand Indians came forward, and were constituted into an Ambulance Corps, to assist in carrying the wounded to the hospitals. Of the service that was rendered in this direction, it is not necessary to speak as it has been recognised even in South Africa. At another time the British Indians were employed to receive the wounded out of the line of fire and carry them to a place more than twenty miles off. When the battle was raging, Major Bapte came to Mr. Gandhi who of course was one of the Volunteers, and represented that if they worked from within the line of the fire they should be rendering incalculable service. At once all the Indian Volunteers responded to the request and dauntlessly exposed themselves to shot and shell. Many an Indian life was lost that day. Such is an unvarnished account of the heroic services rendered by British Indians in South Africa during the Boer War.

The war was over and the Transvaal became a part of the British Empire. Mr. Gandhi was under the impression that, since the wrongs of the British Indian subjects of the Queen were one of the declared causes of the war, under the new Government those wrongs would be a thing of the past. Under this impression he returned to India with no idea of going back, but he was reckoning without his host. The little finger of the new Government was thicker than the loins of the Boers. The Boers

had indeed stung the Indian subjects of the Queen with whips but the new Government stung them with scorpions. A new Asiatic department was constituted to deal with Asiatics as a species apart. A most insidious policy of exclusion was maturing. The prospect was dark and appalling and Mr. Gandhi had to return to the scene of his labours. He interviewed the authorities but he was assured that he had no business to interfere in the matter while they themselves were there to look after everything. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was then in South Africa and a deputation led by Mr. Gandhi waited upon him in Natal. In Pretoria however a similar deputation was disallowed unless Mr. Gandhi was excluded. Evidently Mr. Gandhi's name was becoming gall and worm-wood to the authorities. But he was not the man to be frightened. He determind to fight out the battle in the Law Courts and enrolled himself on the Supreme Court of Pretoria.

He now felt more than ever the imperative need of an organ which should at once educate the South African Indian Community on the one hand and be on the other the faithful mouthpiece of their views. In 1903 a press was bought and the paper "Indian Opinion" was ushered into existence. It was published in four languages, English, Tamil, Guzerati and Hindi. At first it din't prove a success and entailed such heavy loss that during the first year Mr. Gandhi had to pay a sum of £2,000 out of his own pocket. Though in subsequent years the financial position of

the paper has somewhat improved, it has never been a pecuniary success. Notwithstanding, it has grown to be a great force in South Africa and rendered invaluable service during the recent struggle.

In the year 1904 a virulent attack of plague broke out among the Indian Community in Johannesburg. The Municipal authorities were either ignorant or apathetic. Mr. Gandhi, however, was at once on the scene and sent word to the authorities that if immediate action were not taken an epidemic was in prospect. But no answer came. One day the plague carried off as many as twenty-one victims. Mr. Gandhi with three or four noble comrades at once broke open one of the Indian Stores which was empty, and had the patients carried there and did what he could in the matter. The next morning the Municipal authorities bestirred themselves and took the necessary action. The plague lasted a month counting more than a hundred victims. We in India may shudder to think to what an appalling magnitude the outbreak may have grown but for the heroic endeavours of the subject of this sketch, and his devoted comrades.

About this time Mr. Gandhi had been reading Ruskin's "*Unto this Last*" and its influence sank deep into his mind. He was on fire with the idea of country settlements championed therein. Shortly after the plague had subsided he went to Natal and purchased a piece of land at Phoenix, a place situated " on the hill sides of a rich grassy country." Houses

were built and a village sprang up on the mountain side. The inhabitants of the village of whatever rank, dig, plough and cultivate the adjoining land with their own hands. Mr. Gandhi goes to the village whenever he is free and takes part in the work of cultivation like anybody else. But he has had to fulfil this sublime idealistic impulse of his at immense pecuniary sacrifice, for the scheme has, it seems, "absolutely impoverished him."

In 1906 the Zulus broke out in rebellion and a corps of twenty Indians with Mr. Gandhi as leader was formed to help to carry the wounded to the hospitals. The corps subsequently acted as nurses to the wounded. Surely, there is something infinitely elevating in the spectacle of a man of culture and position like our present hero ministering in person to a wounded Zulu.

The bolt at last fell from the blue. In the year 1906 the new Government of the Transvaal brought forward a new law affecting Asiatics, which was sinister, retrograde and obnoxious in the extreme. One morning all the children of Asia in the Transvaal awoke and found themselves called upon to register themselves anew by giving thumb impressions. Thus all Asiatics were placed on a level with convicts. The grimness of the situation dawned on the mind of the Indian community in its utter nakedness. Nor were they slow to take action. A deputation under the leadership of Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Ali was at once sent to England to agitate, if

possible, against the Royal Assent being given to the new legislation. The Royal Assent was withheld in consequence till a constitutional Government should be installed in the Transvaal. A committee in London with Lord Ampthill, ex-Governor of Madras, as chairman, was also formed to keep guard over Indian interests in South Africa. But all this was of no avail. A constitutional Government was soon formed in the Transvaal, the new measure was passed in hot haste, received the Royal Assent, and became law.

A gauntlet was thus thrown in the face of the Transvaal British Indians. The policy of Asiatic exclusion had reached its climax. The elementary rights of human beings had been trampled under foot. To register or not to register was now the question with the Indian Community. To register and sell their honor and self-respect for a mess of pottage, or not to register and "take up arms against a sea of troubles," was the question. All these years Mr. Gandhi had not laboured for nought. Like a true leader he appealed to the better instincts of his followers. He told them that submission to the new law would be tantamount to the immolation of their souls at the altar of their bodies. He told them that registration and perdition were under the circumstances synonymous and that if they had a spark of self-respect in them they should refuse to register and face any troubles in store for them. He preached to them the gospel of passive resistance.

The words of the leader awoke a responsive thrill in thousands of intrepid hearts. Like one man they vowed against the registration. Like one man they resolved to face prosecution and persecution, dungeon and death itself. Like one man they resolved to make atonement for the heaped-up humiliations of many years, by a supreme and triumphant act of self-vindication which should rivet the eyes of the whole world.

The great struggle in the Transvaal thus commenced. The glorious passive resistance movement was thus inaugurated. The law took its course, and a saturnalia of imprisonments ensued. The gaols became literally crammed with the Indians who suffered for conscience sake. High and low, rich and poor, went joyfully to the gaol as to the bridal. Husband was separated from wife, child from parent, and yet the fervour and pertinacity of the struggle abated not. Mr. Gandhi himself was sentenced to two months simple imprisonment. During the trial he took full responsibility for the course adopted by the Indian Community under his leadership and asked for the maximum punishment for himself. The Transvaal authorities were perturbed to see the worm turning, and naturally grew uncomfortable. General Smuts gave his word that if the Indians registered of their own accord the noxious law would be withdrawn. Mr. Gandhi not to embarrass the authorities acceeded to the course, and set an example, himself went to the office to register. The position of a

leader is often-times irksome and dangerous, and so it was in this instance. A Pathan who had joined in the passive resistance movement imagined that Mr. Gandhi was playing the coward and betraying his trust of leadership. He dealt such severe blows to Mr. Gandhi on his way to the registration office that he at once fell down unconscious. His friends afterwards asked him to take action against the Pathan, but he replied that the Pathan had done what he considered right! It is no wonder that he said so, for he has been deeply influenced, by the teaching of the late Count Leo Tolstoy. To resume our story. General Smuts broke faith, and the new law was not expunged from the statute book. The struggle recommenced. Again hundreds were cast into jail, and Mr. Gandhi among them for a term of two months with hard labour. We have no space to refer to the hardships he endured with his brother sufferers in jail, to his many acts of self-denial, and to the sublime manner in which he bore up, believing, as he did, that suffering is the heaven-ordained path to perfection.

After his release he was appointed to lead a deputation to England, in the year 1909. But nothing worth mentioning came of it. The sequel of the story, the deportations of hundreds of Indians, and the return of the deportees to the Transvaal, all this is well-known. The struggle is still going on, and the end is not yet.

Whatever the end and whenever it come, there is

no doubt that the Transvaal struggle has served to reveal a man of exceptional capacity, lofty aims, and unblemished character. And that man, we need hardly say is Mr. Gandhi. It would not be easy to do justice to a character such as his. He is one of those rare men with whom the life of the soul is a living reality. His principles are no mere cloak to be donned and doffed at will, but are part and parcel of his being, which he never barters for any mess of pottage however tempting. He has often been known to withdraw from a suit, if convinced that it was not true. His life is a ceaseless striving to "rise on the stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things," and is a unity such as few lives are.

Well has it been said that the future Indian Nation is being built up in South Africa. By those who realise the full purport of this remark the claim of Mr. Gandhi to rank high among the great builders of the Indian Nation will hardly be disputed.

It is this Builder of the Indian Nation on a foreign strand of whom the latest news is that the South African Government have consigned him to the horrors of Jail for 15 months. Why? Not for cheating, or thieving or murdering or any breach of peace—but because he would not advise his suffering brethren to conform to iniquitous impositions which are a disgrace to civilization and to Christianity.

Our countrymen and countrywomen have to pay a 3 £ pole-tax for the s[illegible] of being Indians. Hindu

and Mahomedan marriages—though between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others—are stigmatised as no marriages at all. Such are the insults hurled in the face of Indians—both those in South Africa and those who stay at home—by this Boer British Government. It is to be hoped that through the firm representations of the Government of India, the Imperial Government will put a stop to these manifestations of the Boer spirit under the guise of British legislation.

MR. GANDHI'S RECENT TRIAL.

HIS ADDRESS BEFORE THE COURT.

Addressing the Court at Volksrust, Mr. Gandhi said that he had given the Minister of the Interior due notice of his intention to cross the border with the prohibited immigrants, and had informed the Immigration Officer at Volksrust of the date of crossing. He assured the Court that the present movement had nothing whatever to do with the unlawful entry of a single Indian for the purpose of residence in the Transvaal. He might fairly claim that during his whole career in the Transvaal he had been actuated by a desire to assist the Government in preventing surreptitious entry and unlawful settlement, but he pleaded guilty to knowingly committing an offence against the Section under which he was charged. He was aware that his action was fraught with the greatest risks and intense personal suffering to his followers. He was

convinced that nothing short of much sufferin[illegible] would move the conscience of the Governor, or [illegible] the inhabitants of the Union, of which, in spite [illegible] [illegible] breach of the laws, he claimed to be a sane and [illegible]-abiding citizen.

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